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MAPLE-LEAF SONGS

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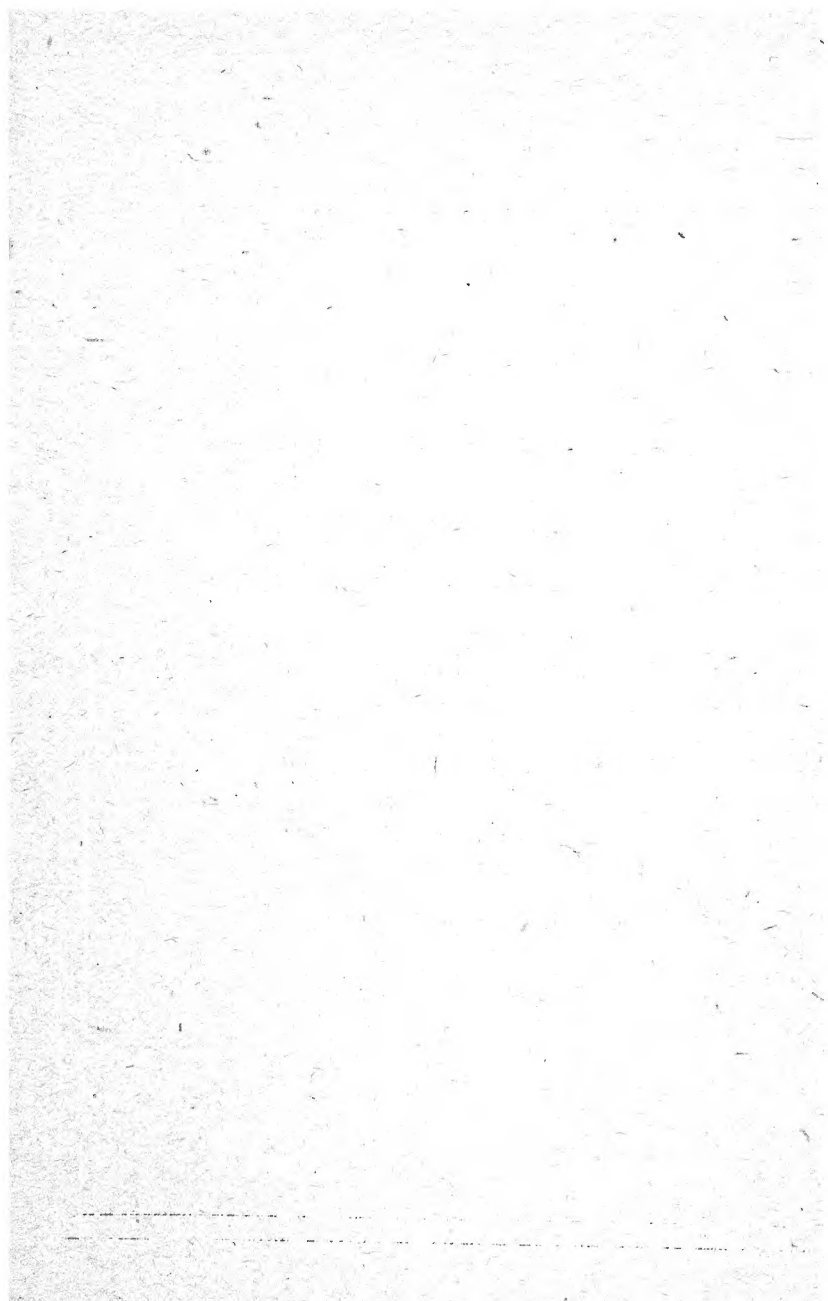
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# MAPLE-LEAF SONGS

By  
FREDERICK NIVEN



London : Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd.



## MAPLE-LEAF SONGS





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BY  
FREDERICK NIVEN



London : Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd.  
v 3 Adam Street, Adelphi

MCMXVII

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**DEDICATED TO**  
**MY FRIENDS IN THE CANADIAN**  
**EXPEDITIONARY FORCES**



## PREFATORY NOTE

ONE of the greatest pleasures that has ever come to me is that occasioned by hearing of how certain verses I wrote about "B.C." are treasured by many members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in France. Copies of *The Daily News* (in which they originally appeared) were evidently sent, in no small numbers, to the boys at the Front by friends who had seen them. But the copies of the *News*, thus sent, were not sufficient for the demand that arose. It has made me tremendously grateful to the Muse for inspiring, and to *The Daily News* for publishing these verses, to hear of how they were copied by hand and by aid of typewriters; to hear of a slightly whimsical episode too: of how a man who had made, on demand, several copies for comrades (he having a typewriter and an office) was one day handed a folded sheet by an old acquaintance (last seen in the Yellow Head Pass, and not again till that meeting in France), and told to read. On unfolding the proffered paper, which had clearly seen much service, and by its hue had been "up the line," he found it was one of the typescripts he had made

weeks before, in an attempt to supply the demand of the boys who, caring for the Dominion, and for verse, cared for these. Such enquiries as could be answered in the midst of the main business that occupies everybody in Europe to-day brought evidence to the delighted transcriber that his tattered copy had passed through many hands. And I would care little for Canada, or for the verses I write, if, on hearing of this incident, I was not at least equally pleased.

Repeated requests from members of the Canadian Contingent for copies of "B.C." (crowned with that jolly episode) have caused me to gather these verses together into a little book. The day of the broadsheet is not our day, and "B.C." must go out with others, instead of alone. I trust that some of the others—two of which, I have to state, with acknowledgments to the Editors in question, have already been in print: "Inventory" in *The New Statesman* (London), and "River Saint Lawrence" in *The University Magazine* (Montreal)—may also find friends.

F. N.

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# MAPLE-LEAF SONGS

“ B.C.”

THE yellow bench-lands gleam and glow  
Under an azure sky ;  
Above the benches trees arow  
March upward, very high ;  
And higher than the trees again  
The scarpéd summit stands :  
My heart is desolate because  
I cannot see these lands.

The winding trails go up and down,  
The tributary trails  
That lead to roads that lead to town,  
A town beside the rails.  
But happy he who quits the train  
And on the wagon-road  
Rides watching for the old blazed tree ;  
He needs not any goad.

Dear God, if prayers of men avail  
For special things with Thee,  
This would I pray—To hit the trail,  
And smell the balsam tree ;

To see the eagles coasting heaven ;  
The sun-shafts striking deep  
In lonely lakes and laughing streams ;  
To hear the chipmunks cheep ;

To give the high-ball to old friends,  
And throw the reins abroad,  
As men there do when travel ends ;  
This would I ask, O God ;  
To see the pack-train glide and lope  
A-patter through the woods,  
All silent in the old cone-dust  
Of these old solitudes.

Some call the Indians dirty folk,  
But I again would see,  
And smell, Great Spirit, wood-fire smoke  
Of some red man's tipi.  
One sign that I was back again  
In these tremendous lands,  
Would be the sight of silver rings  
On brown and lissome hands.

The bench's yellow pales and fades,  
The sun ebbs up the hill,  
'Tis dark in the deep forest glades,  
'Tis dark and very still ;  
The sunlight on the summit dies,  
—Was that a drop of rain ?—  
I knew it once from dawn to dusk  
And would go home again.

## BOW RIVER

(ALBERTA)

I LAY upon a mighty bluff  
Beside the River Bow,  
Betwixt the sunlight and the breeze  
I let all worries go,  
Amid the bunch-grass at my ease  
Beside the River Bow.

No boss was nigh me to rebuff  
A kid for lying low ;  
The fluff from out a cottonwood  
Went drifting by like snow,  
As there I lay in restful mood  
Beside the River Bow.

Beside the River Bow I lay  
And heard the water flow,  
And marked the Sarcee's white tipis  
With smoky tops just show  
Amid a grove of poplar trees  
That fringed the River Bow.

## BOW RIVER

I lay there half a summer's day ;  
The sand-hills were aglow ;  
A hundred miles away to west  
The Rocky peaks, arow,  
Rose up like peaks of amethyst  
Seen from the River Bow.

Just yesterday it sometimes seems,  
And sometimes long ago,  
That on that mighty bluff I lay  
And let all worries go,  
Watching the gophers at their play  
Beside the River Bow.

I journey back again in dreams,  
Back to the River Bow ;  
I hear my pinto tear the grass,  
I feel the thin winds blow,  
And see the dreams of God that pass  
Beside the River Bow.

## SO-LONG

As far as Barnet, Billy came  
To set me forth upon my way ;  
And if you know a kind of shame  
At showing just how much you feel  
At certain times, you'll understand  
Why Billy briefly took my hand,  
Then whisked around upon his heel,  
My buddy Billy, when he came  
To set me on my way.

But Barnet Camp I still can see  
And hear : the saws were buzzing shrill,  
The Inlet rippled pleasantly.  
Back to Vancouver Billy went,  
But with my bundle I hiked on  
And hit the ties to Harrison—  
Pondering on life and what it meant—  
When Billy said so-long to me  
Beside Camp Barnet mill.

## THE SON OF A GUN CAME BACK

I WENT back East for to observe,  
And took with me a wad of bills  
To last a month. A week would serve  
The meanest cuss in all them hills.  
To put you wise why I came West,  
Some prompt, one word will tell the rest—  
'Nuff said.

The men there look you up and down  
The way the gals each other do,  
After the bargain-sale in town  
When they are fixed in something noo.  
And all they get who look like that  
Is the price-ticket in your hat,  
That's straight!

It's good to hit the high plateau  
And see the fellers long and lean  
Projectin' up and down, and know  
You're home again. There's nothing mean  
About them fellers ridin' by  
With stirrups long and saddles high—  
That's what!

## BUFFALO BONES

WHY in thunder must men die ?

Say, it surely puzzles me  
When I see the boys ride by,  
Ridin' easy, ridin' free.

Singin' down the wagon-road

Once, I sudden quits my song,  
For I met a wagon-load  
Made my singin' seem all wrong.

"What's them bones ?" The plug explains

This that stops my dulcet tones—  
Buff'lo bones from off the plains ;  
Say ! They was some buff'lo bones.

All is gathered ; there's no more ;

Buff'loes gone, and bones as well,  
Sold to some back-east bone-store ;  
Partners ! Wouldn't that freeze Hell ?

Bones ! It sometimes hits me fair :

As with buff'loes, so with me,  
Me, that rides through open air,  
Ridin' easy, singin' free.

## THE IMPERIAL LIMITED

THERE'S something happens in my heart  
When in that depôt once again  
I see the boards—" Arrive "—" Depart "  
And verify the west-bound train.

Then to that café where I sit  
Each time, the farewell meal to eat ;  
I think my ghost shall visit it,  
Its window table, window seat.

The barrier next—and there I show  
The long good ticket to the west.  
" Go right ahead ! " Ahead I go  
Right gladly at that terse behest.

The train beside the platform stands,  
Inert and mute ; and one by one  
The travellers come, some shaking hands  
With many friends, and some alone.

My train of trains begins to fill ;  
One asketh what the time may be  
When she pulls out ; enough if still  
Again she will pull out with me.



That mild impingement on the car  
Proclaims, without a voice that said  
What it proclaimed—the time's not far,  
The locomotive's on ahead.

And at that chanted utterance  
Of "All aboard!" I have to grip  
My seat: Were I to rise and dance  
They'd call me crazy, stop my trip!

Ah, though expressionless I be,  
As one who neither heeds nor feels,  
My heart is full, plumb full of glee  
At the rickety-tick of west-bound wheels.

## THE WAY TO WINDERMERE, B.C.

THE lodge poles stand beside the trail  
Upon the way to Windermere :  
The land is a well-wooded land,  
Trees fit for lodge poles grow at hand  
And so the red men leave these here  
And only pack the tent along,  
Rolled featly up with buckskin thong,  
When they come riding down the trail,  
The pleasant trail to Windermere.

Epochs o'erlap upon this way,  
This ancient way to Windermere :  
Here goes the pack-train with its load  
A-loping down the twining road ;  
Here does the auto-stage-man steer,  
Once weekly ; with a sound like hail  
He hits the high parts of the trail.  
The trail ? The road ! The furrowed way,  
The winding way to Windermere.

And as the auto rips along  
And bobs and leaps to Windermere,  
It often meets upon the way  
That relic of a former day,

## THE WAY TO WINDERMERE, B.C. 21

The " prairie-schooner," with some queer  
And gnarled old-timer holding in  
Scared horses, scared at all the din  
That devil-wagon makes along  
The tranquil road to Windermere.

Still may the smoky lodge poles stand  
Though rails should run to Windermere,  
As frail memorials remain,  
And round and up them once again  
The squirrels dart, the chipmunks peer.  
Of how men came, and live, and die  
(Like poplar cotton drifting by)  
The lodge poles for a symbol stand  
Beside the road to Windermere.

## SUN WORSHIP AT KANANASKIS

To see the morning come again  
At Kananaskis is a thing  
So perfect it is almost pain,  
So deep it is too deep to sing.

Yet would I fain essay some song  
Of waking woods, and waking rills,  
And morning magic on the long  
Grey rolls of the Alberta hills.

There is a wavering of plumes  
To east, white plumes, tremendous high ;  
A hint of what's to come illumines  
The scarves of cloud that westward lie.

And subtly through the greyness creeps  
A primrose hue, suspected more  
Than sure as yet. The camp still sleeps,  
Though Dawn is fumbling at the door.

All's still and strange, all's strangely still  
And awed before this miracle  
Of gold outlining each grey hill :  
You watch it, silent, in a spell.

SUN WORSHIP AT KANANASKIS 23

Till something flashing high to west  
    Draws round your head and craves your eyes,  
And out of your warm blanket-nest  
    In awe, in reverence, you rise—

To see the Rockies mirroring  
    The Dawn from their eternal peaks,  
The Day, that to the grass doth bring  
    New green, new purple to the creeks.

And then the white man understands  
    Why all the red men here-away  
Revere the sun, and raise their hands  
    In adoration to the Day.

## AT DUNMORE JUNCTION

At Dunmore Junction you must change,  
Bound eastward from the Crow's Nest Pass,  
And there await the Eastbound Main :  
To do so needs a heart of brass.

Whether it be the morning train  
Or night train brings you to Dunmore,  
That change you never shall forget ;  
'Tis like a slowly closing door.

A-sudden comes the ancient fret,  
For, stepping from the stuffy cars,  
You are held spell-bound by the air  
And thrall'd by sunlight, or the stars.

Then, breathing deep, you do not care  
If eastbound trains have ceased to run :  
This vasty west for you seems made,  
Your eastbound journey here seems done.

Vain warning ! No man may evade  
That poignant hour that doth derange  
His schemes, when, from the Crow's Nest Pass,  
At Dunmore Junction he must change,

## MATTAGAMI

A THOUSAND miles from south to north,  
Five hundred, say, from west to east,  
The farmers, settling up the earth,  
Have left this land to bird and beast—  
The wolf, the bear, the antlered deer,  
That through the thickets pad and peer.

Most white men, visiting that land  
On snow-shoes, or in birch canoe,  
With these dense woods on either hand,  
Go quiet as the Indians do  
That down its water path-ways steer,  
To trap the wolf, the bear, the deer.

No townsman born can ever feel  
Wholly at ease when travelling there ;  
The silence of that land doth seal  
His lips ; a boat-song seems to dare  
Some Spirit—though there's none to hear  
Save wolf, and bear and antlered deer.

Oh, wander east, and wander west,  
And in far cities make your home—  
But oft, at memory's behest,  
Your spirit through this land shall roam,  
And you, a ghost, through silence steer,  
And taste the ancient love and fear.

## NORTHLAND RIVERS

THE haunting Northland rivers  
Disturb me here in town,  
In Montreal I hear them call  
As I go up and down ;  
Behind the buzz and clang of cars,  
The rattle and the hum,  
In street and square, and everywhere,  
Because the spring has come.

One river of the Northland  
Is called by a name  
To suit them all, by ford and fall—  
In one way all the same :  
The name of it is with me  
In dreams, asleep, awake,  
A dear refrain just touched with pain :  
God's River—and God's Lake.

Most things that I have toiled for  
Have come, the toil not vain ;  
But if it be I may not see  
My Northland streams again,



## NORTHLAND RIVERS

27

I think, so well I love them,  
That in the After-days  
In ghost-canoe I'll paddle through  
These quiet water-ways.

## FRIEND CHIPMUNK

As I was hiking down the grade  
From Greenwood, hiking to Midway,  
A little chipmunk with me made  
The cutest kind of chipmunk-play.

He'd sit and wait ahead of me,  
A-chirping, till I came as near  
As five or, say, six feet maybe,  
Then frisk his tail, and off he'd clear.

That waving tail was full of fun  
(Sure his whole shape was full of it !)  
He'd bounce ahead, and frisk and run,  
Then on his haunches up he'd sit.

As I advanced he chirped to me  
And (him and me alone like that)  
I chirped to him : his eyes danced glee  
As there upon the grade he sat ;

Then off again when I drew near  
As five feet, or six feet, or so,  
Way down the track, with fun, not fear,  
The little varmint thing would go.

The miles I disremember now ;  
Say nine. From Greenwood to Midway  
He was my partner anyhow,  
Kept friskin' that ways all the way.

Until we hit the scattered shacks  
That then was Midway ; not till there  
From off the grade the beast made tracks—  
Say eight miles easy ; that I'll swear.

Just fellows that have never seen  
A chipmunk play and frisk at all  
(The knowing kind, that's also green)  
Would call this anecdote too tall.

Them that have studied chipmunks well  
Will take on trust that half my tale ;  
But, in the rest I have to tell,  
If they misdoubt, I must not rail.

This is the rest : When I came back,  
Eastbound to Greenwood from Midway,  
My feet had scarcely hit the track  
When up he bounced again to play.

Out of the bush corvetting came,  
A-chirping and a-frisking good ;  
As he went west with me, the same  
Came east, from Midway to Greenwood,

Till where the woods thin out, and you  
Can see to south, beyond the track,  
That little burg; 'twas there he drew  
Aside. And looking o'er my back

I see him settin' on his rump,  
His little forepaws hangin' down,  
Settin' right doleful on a stump—  
And I went smilin' back to town.

## THE SONG OF A SHOVEL-STIFF

UP in the Dry-belt, Ashcroft way,  
From seven till noon, from one till six,  
To play that tune that wanderers play  
With rasping shovels, clinking picks,  
Seemed, most days, a fair lengthy day.

It was so hot we had to stand  
The pinch-bars upright. If one threw  
A pinch-bar down in that hot sand  
The next to lift the pinch-bar knew  
How hot it was : 'twould burn the hand.

Upward, as well, the heat would pour  
Out of the Pit we shovelled in.  
Each round his neck a loose scarf wore  
To keep from blistering 'neath the chin—  
And shovelling seemed the damndest bore.

That's why we smiled in sheer delight  
If some one came on solid rock ;  
For then we gave her dynamite  
And stood off waiting for the shock—  
And had a little rest all right.

## 32 THE SONG OF A SHOVEL-STIFF

But most days there was nary rock,  
And if a man played 'possum then  
The boss's voice supplied the shock,  
That voice that sounded sweetly when  
He said : " Knock off, boys, six o'clock ! "

Then straightway all the toil, and heat,  
And anguish of the bended back,  
Were nothing. We trooped down to eat—  
In that old car beside the track—  
A square no swell hotel could beat.

And slacked our belts, and heaved the sigh  
Of mighty ease ; and took our wage  
Of toil up there—in starry sky,  
And upland dusk, and scent of sage,  
And Thompson River singing by.

## THINKING OF CANADA

THRUSH, within this English lane,  
Trying o'er your flageolet,  
Singing season here again,  
Hint of June in mid-March rain,  
What is this that you recall,  
Tuning o'er your flageolet,  
To make England's beauty pall  
And to fill me with regret ?

As your reedy notes begin,  
Tuning up your flageolet,  
Thoughts of your Canadian kin  
Tuning thus, now rich, now thin,  
Set an exile's heart a-fret.

Thrush, your brother thrush out there,  
Later tries his flageolet—  
So there still is time to spare ;  
Sailing now I'll hear him where  
Life has not grown petty yet.

Thrush, you sound me my recall,  
Trying o'er your flageolet ;  
England's beautiful, but small—  
Fields, and woods, and skies, and all.

Thrush, within this English lane,  
Tuning o'er your flageolet,

How you fill my heart with pain  
And the home-sick fret !



## HENRY HOUSE

THOUGH "Henry House" is on the maps,  
There's nothing there but creeks and woods ;  
No fort, no traders, no trade goods.  
'Tis weird when some woodpecker taps ;  
Or when some old tree falls, perhaps,  
With muffled thud in the deep woods.

There was a House there years ago  
Owned by the Nor'West Company,  
A fur-shop built in rivalry  
To Jasper—twenty miles below,  
Or thirty, as the waters flow—  
Built by the other Company.

But still upon this clearer space,  
On Athabasca's western shore,  
By scouting round you can restore  
A picture of that one-time place,  
The ground-plan mark, the door-way trace—  
And see the ghosts along the shore.

The ruins of two chimneys stand  
At either end. They saw to that—  
That they were cosy when they sat  
Snow-bound—this little distant band

Of traders in that lonely land ;  
'Tis queer to think they sat by *that*.

For all is ruin. Logs and stone  
Are crumbled, grown upon by grass ;  
The hungry winter wolves that pass  
Smell not so much there as a bone :  
The Ancient Mother claims her own,  
Wraps Henry House in snow, and grass.

## THE CRY OF THE LOON

I NEVER hear the loon's lone cry

But this deep sorrow stirs in me :

That one who loves the world must die ;

This joy : that I'm alive and free.

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN MUSINGS

THE camp is lonely. It has been so since  
Upon that crest my partner showed, hull-down,  
Then vanished. All the forest's reticence  
Closed round the camp when Billy went to town.

There are too many things beyond my ken,  
Without, within, in what I see and feel :  
O brooding mountains, do ye hold for men  
A secret that some magic might reveal ?

Billy's been gone to Barkerville a week,  
And all that while the woods have looked at me  
Under their branches. Why do ye not speak,  
Ye woods, and tell me of Eternity ?

'Tis lonesome here. It may be that no man  
Has ever broken trail into this place  
And made a smoke here since the world began ;  
No other sign except a bear's I trace.

The camp is high. Night whelmeth up, not down,  
Upon me here. It glooms the woods below,  
Then riseth hither ; the red trees go brown,  
Then black, although the peaks are still a-glow.

Dawn floodeth down—sending the wolves to bed,  
 To cry no more—illumine each peak,  
 Tips tree-tops golden, turns brown forests red :  
 I wait in Silence for a Voice to speak.

If I should stay here a long while, alone,  
 With tree-tops and the mountain-tops for friends,  
 Would the Voice come some day, and all be known  
 That I have wondered—how Life comes, and  
 ends ?

It is not Fear I feel, it is not Dread—  
 Because I love this camp-place lone and high ;  
 But it was thus long syne, and when I'm dead  
 It shall be thus : and I am hushed thereby.

I wish my partner would come back again,  
 He's gone too long. The Unknown grips my  
 soul,  
 But will not speak. I lend my ear in vain ;  
 The soundless days one after one unroll.

Here comes my partner breaking through the  
 brush !  
 He's back too soon, too soon ! I may not know  
 What I had almost fathomed in the hush—  
 Whence I have come, and whither I must go.

## A SONG OF MOWING

WE went to mow the meadow ;  
The sun was shining bright ;  
The mountain's mighty shadow  
Wheeled slowly left to right.

All day we mowed the meadow,  
Our arms went forth and back,  
The mountain's mighty shadow  
Kept wheeling round, alack.

Years since we mowed that meadow ;  
The scythes were shining bright,  
Till the sundial mountain shadow  
Went drifting into night.

O you, who mowed the meadow  
With me, long years ago,  
Are you in sun or shadow,  
In darkness, or in dawn ?

## RIVER SAINT LAWRENCE

SAINT LAWRENCE is a noble stream :  
All tasteful mariners declare  
That unto them its waters seem  
Unmatched by any anywhere.

Along the shore, like bits of France,  
Bright villages and poplars stand  
'Mid emerald meadows that entrance  
All strangers entering the land.

On ocean steamers, surging down  
That thousand miles of opal stream,  
The noisy bells of some small town,  
Far-heard, sound sweet as in a dream.

But what a man remembers best  
Is how, before the land appears,  
There comes a scent from out the west  
That toucheth to the fount of tears.

It is the balsam scent of woods,  
Blown out to sea, to meet and tell  
The stranger of these solitudes—  
Of Canada, and of her spell.



From Lachine Rapids to Gaspé  
Old circumnavigators go,  
And leaning o'er the taffrail say :  
“ There is no lordlier stream doth flow.”



## INVENTORY

WAS ever man so drawn before  
By diverse loves ? One clings to shore ;  
The other takes the foam-flecked sea  
In quest of far adversity.

The one desireth opal rings,  
And silks as frail as are the wings  
Of humming-birds ; carved ivories ;  
Quaint bronzes made by Japanese ;  
Old jars, unearthed in Babylon,  
The Pharaohs must have looked upon ;  
Tear-bottles hid two thousand years,  
Once moist with Cleopatra's tears,  
But now so old they seem to be  
Brimful of calm eternity ;  
Venetian mirrors ; scimitars  
With jewelled hilts, once used in wars,  
But gem-wrought with so much of love  
They now like healing unctions prove.

The other calls to sun-scorched toil  
By lava-bed and sandy soil,  
To travelling the tremendous trail  
Where it is splendid even to fail.  
It calls unto the sound and sight  
Of seas that swirl through purple night,

Whose stars are magical as when  
Jason beheld them, and his men.

Ah me ! Whichever life I choose  
I can but sip of it, must lose  
Far more than ever I shall quaff—  
Life is so brief, the hours thereof  
Too speedy for a man to do  
The things of one. I ask for two !

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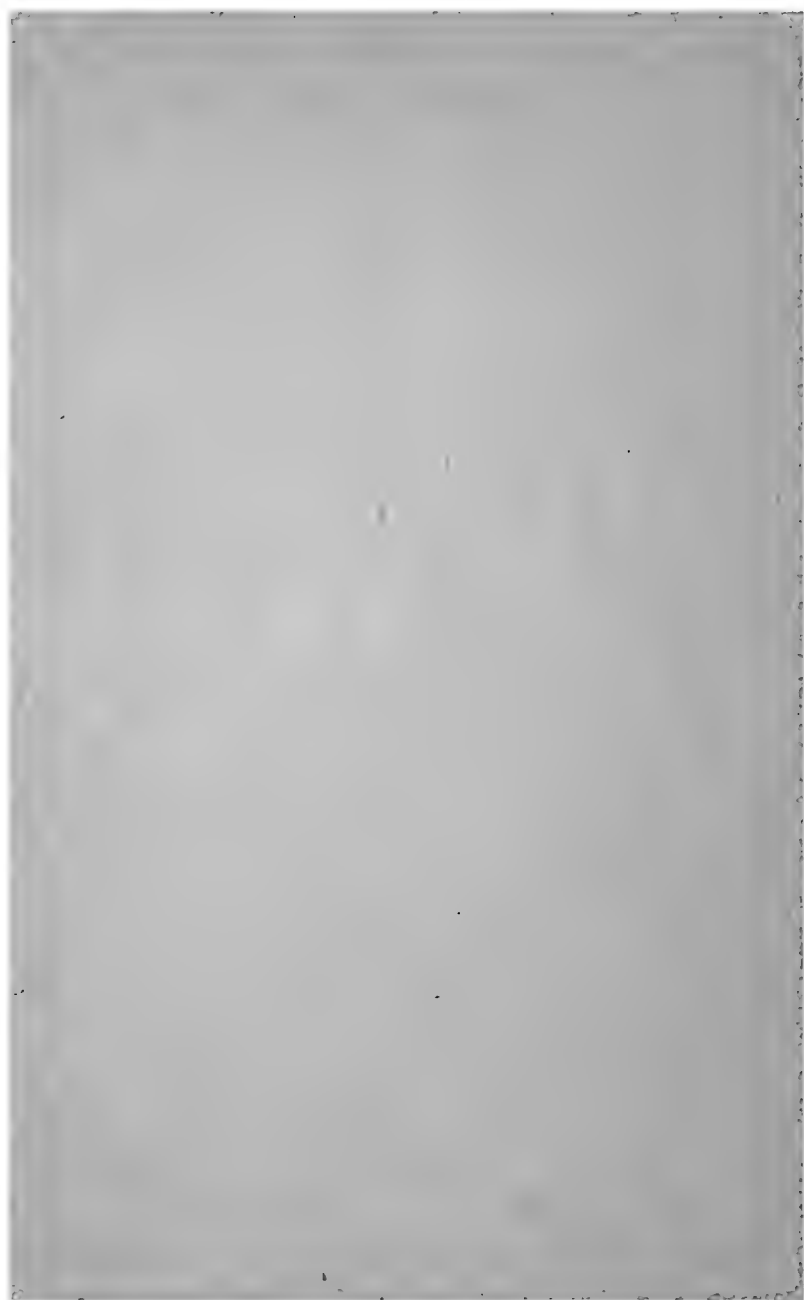
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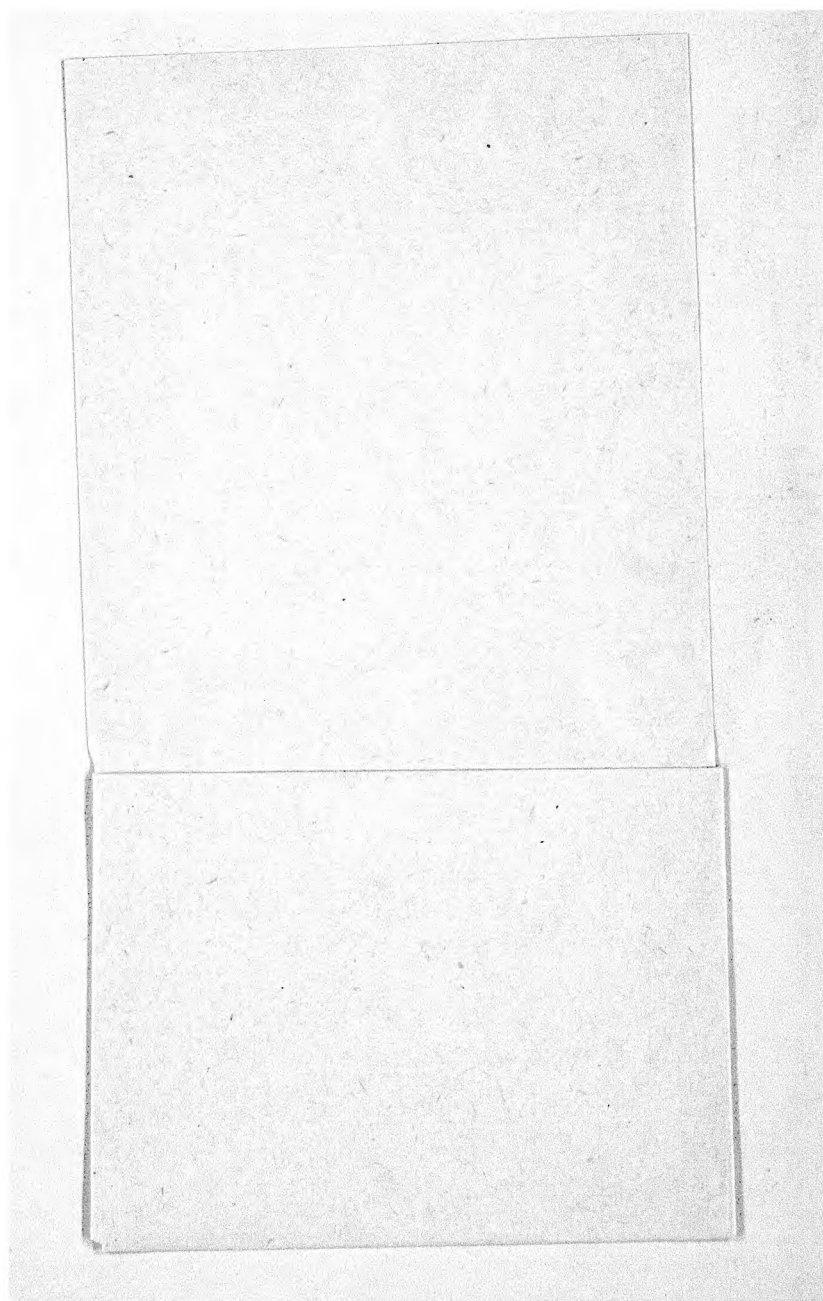


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